

Pallo Jordan - Speech at the 20th anniversary of the Bisho Massacre, 7 September 2012

Thank you Programme Director,

Madam /Acting Premier of the Eastern Cape,

Members of the Provincial Legislature and Government,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Comrades and friends,

All protocol observed.

Like so many of the landmarks along our long walk to freedom, September 7th 1992 does not mark a happy occasion. It was day on which the political and social forces striving to give birth to a democratic South Africa, clashed head-on with the joint forces of reaction represented by the tin-pot military strongman, Brigadier Oupa Gqozo and the die-hards of the apartheid regime. Twenty-eight people were mowed down in a desperate act of repression.

On the 8th September 1992, then President of the ANC, Comrade Nelson Mandela's issued a public statement on the Bisho Massacre. The message read in part:

"Each one of the people who lost their lives at Bisho yesterday, 7th September, was a unique human being. The daughter or the son of some mother; the father or mother to some child; a person linked to a home, to a community of relatives and friends who had loved, cherished and nurtured her or him for many years in the hope of a continuing and shared future.

Thousands marched full of hope for a better tomorrow. Dozens did not return.

Those fateful four minutes of gunfire, that reverberated through the length and breadth of South Africa, snuffed out those lives as if they were of no consequence. The staccatto of those automatic weapons added one more grisly episode to the already bloodstained annals of twentieth century South Africa.

The facts of what occurred have been established by the international media and eyewitnesses representing local and international agencies whose reputations are beyond reproach. The shootings were unprovoked and were not preceded by any warning. Lethal force was employed as the first option of the Ciskei Security Forces in circumstances that did not even remotely warrant its use.

We condemn these killings in the strongest possible terms!

To the bereaved families; to the relatives and friends who have lost their loved ones we offer our heartfelt condolences. The words of comfort and sympathy we pronounce can however do nothing to restore the lives that have been so brutally cut short . We can but hope that these few tokens of our deep concern will lend them the support to alleviate their sorrow. We mourn with the communities of the Border region that continue to bleed even while our country makes its troubled transition from the autocracy of apartheid to democracy.

From this day, Bhishe will rank alongside Boipatong on that roll call of infamy that recounts the past two years of F.W. de Klerk's incumbency. The authors of yesterday's massacre already stand condemned in the eyes of the nation and the world for their criminal actions."

Twenty eight people were killed on September 7th 1992, two years before South Africa's first democratic elections. 200 more were wounded in a fusillade that lasted more than 1 minute. The massacre at Bhishe followed close on the heels of the Boipatong Massacre of 17th June 1992, when armed assailants organised by the Third Force attacked a small township, killing 45 people and injuring scores. It was later revealed that the attack was an aspect of "Operation Marion", a destabilisation campaign run by the generals of military intelligence to thwart progress to democratic elections. Though Dr Mangosutho Buthelezi strenuously denied any involvement by his party or supporters in that murderous incident, at the TRC six members of the IFP applied for amnesty for their involvement in the Boipatong massacre!

During the centenary year of the ANC, on 16th August 2012, thirty four mineworkers were killed. Eighteen years into South African democracy, the first post-democracy state massacre occurred under circumstances that still need to be unpacked and closely investigated by a judicial enquiry.

The circumstances and the environment in which these two massacres took place does make them vastly different events. Yet ;

- Who is here so bold as to say the tears shed for those who died on August 16th 2012 are less bitter than those shed for the fallen of September 7th 1992?
- Who is here so callous as to suggest that the death of a father, a husband, a brother, a son, a relative, a neighbour – is less painful because those who fired the shots were employed by a different government?
- Who is here, so heartless as to suggest that the lives lost at Marikana are less valued, less precious, less important than those of the victims of Boipatong and Bisho?
- Who is here so hard-hearted, insensitive and cold as to suggest that our humanity; the humanity of our community; the humanity of our people, of all South Africans was not violated when the live ammunition was fired into a crowd of protesting mineworkers?

- Who is here so unfeeling as not to recognise that this massacre and the blood of the fallen cry out for a thorough and intense investigation to get to the root causes of this terrible tragedy and to hold to account those responsible?

We are here today to mark one of those terrible moments in South Africa's march to democracy, 7th September 1992. In the euphoria that accompanies much of our celebration of our democracy we too often forget the price that was exacted from our people before we arrived at 27th April 1994.

In our enthusiasm for the democratic order, for our Constitution and the democratic institutions we have today, it is all too often forgotten that those last four years of apartheid, between February 2nd 1990 and 27th April 1994, witnessed some of the worst bloodletting, overt and covert state sponsored violence South Africa had yet witnessed in a century.

It is absolutely necessary that we remind ourselves of the character of the much praised "peaceful transition"; it was peaceful only in part! The sacrifices of the numerous families who lost their loved ones during those fateful four years demand that we acknowledge that our "peaceful transition" was peaceful in that the ANC and its armed combatants had declared a unilateral ceasefire in 1990 and did not once retaliate against the apartheid state apparatus or its agents for the murders they visited on entire communities, in Natal, in the Gauteng, in Mpumalanga and in the Free State.

One of the most diabolical aspects of racist repression was the regime's ability to outsource that repression to puppet regimes like those of Matanzima, Oupa Gqozo and other "homeland leaders".

The massacre at Bisho in September 1992 was one such instance.

After de Klerk announced the unbanning of the ANC, PAC the SACP, BCM and other organisations on 2nd February 1990, it was very clear to all of us in the liberation movement that his actions were inspired both by the pressure from below in the shape of mass struggles and international isolation, as well as a hard-nosed realism on the part of the NP leadership who opted to negotiate to avoid total defeat.

We entered negotiations from a position of political stalemate.

South Africa's transition consequently would have two features. One was the attempt by the then dominant White minority to save what they could by accommodating some of the demands of the oppressed; the other would be continuing pressure from below, driven by the people's own desire to realise a freedom that was meaningful and that gave real content to democracy.

Within the ranks of the liberation movement itself there was an ongoing debate about the best tactics to employ. I think comrades will recall what was then called the "tap, the boat and the Leipzig option" debate – during which some comrades argued for tactics that treated mass action like a tap that could be turned on and off, as and when the occasion

demanded. Others at the same time argued that within the NP de Klerk and his supporters were not necessarily fully in charge, their position was being challenged by “stand-patters” and for us to rock the boat might well assist these more intransigent elements amongst them who opposed change. There was the third point of view that advocated sustained pressure on the de Klerk government on all fronts, similar to the mass demonstrations in Leipzig and other places that finally forced Erich Honecker and his colleagues to resign as the government of the GDR in 1990.

The 80,000 (eighty thousands) who marched on Bisho to demand the dissolution of the puppet state called the Ciskei and its reincorporation within the official borders of South Africa were participants in a campaign of mass action, inspired by the ANC and its allies. We regarded that demonstration as one of many levers to break the log-jams in the negotiating process and to maintain popular pressure that was so necessary to compel the de Klerk government to negotiate in earnest.

The ANC had withdrawn from CODESA in protest against the Boipatong massacre on 17th June 1992, three months previously. The March on Bisho, that resulted in a Massacre was the high-point in a continuing campaign of mass action. The regime and its surrogates responded to it with bullets!

The distressing of this moment, in 2012, when we our people are once again mourning, is that it throws into very sharp relief the contradictions arising from those two dimensions of our democratic transition.

Because the midwives of democratic South Africa were both mass pressure and elite accommodation, the property relations of the old South Africa were carried over into the new. Yes, to be sure, democratic law has makes it illegal to deny any South African access to or the right to own property on grounds of race. But those who had in the past acquired their property precisely on grounds of their race, were allowed to keep it. One could call it a compromise to the effect that the beneficiaries of racism would keep their ill-gotten wealth provided they agreed to political democracy.

The outcome has been is that we de-racialised property-ownership, but at the same time we racialised poverty ! What’s more we racially gendered poverty! Using any index one might want, poverty in South Africa is a condition suffered by Blacks in general, the Africans in particular, and is concentrated specifically amongst African women!

The arrival of democracy has opened the path to property-acquisition and capital accumulation to a small minority of Africans who have since become capitalists engaged in mining, agriculture, secondary industry, finance management and banking. But it has left un-changed the large pockets of poverty that compel thousands of other Africans to descend into the bowls of the earth to extract the minerals that go to enrich a few.

The system of “bantus homelands” stood at the centre of a migrant labour system devised in 1905 specifically to produce and reproduce an easily exploitable labour force from amongst landless peasants forced to join the working class. After 1948, when the NP first won a majority in Parliament, the system was further refined by delegating a number of policing

functions to “homeland governments”, four of whom even opted for the cynical “independence” that the NP foisted on them.

From the inception of mining in this country, the eastern Cape, like many of our impoverished rural areas and those of South Africa’s immediate neighbours, have annually supplied thousands of men to work on the mines. We need not detain ourselves here recounting the palling, concentration-camp-like conditions under which African mineworkers were forced to live and work.

Our campaigns to improve the lot of the African miners declaimed to our country and to the world, that :

- It is a crime to place the African peasant in circumstances compelling him to seek work on the mines!
- It is a crime to monitor, control and oppress African miners with dompasses and permits;
- It is crime to house African miners in unhealthy compounds under prison-like conditions!
- It is a crime to pay African miners starvation wages while mining corporations and bosses got rich;

What words shall we pronounce today?

What words can express the criminality of actually shooting African miners during a protest ??!

The massacre here at Bisho, on 7th September 1992 was an unprovoked act of repression perpetrated by a desperate puppet regime, run by a drunken maniac and sustained by mercenaries and a repressive police force.

How will future generations account for this first post-democracy massacre?

How do we, as the militants of the liberation movement

- that brought this country democracy;
- that helped craft a much-envied democratic Constitution;
- that has created the Constitutional framework enabling thousands of those previously held down beneath an iron ceiling to become socially mobile;
- that transformed South Africa into a land of hope by casting open the doors of opportunity for millions:

What meaning do we read in this post-democratic massacre??

How do we account for this post democracy state massacre?

If ever there was a moment for us all to take stock, it is now!

Marikana is a terrible tragedy as the first post democracy massacre, but we can also turn it into a moment for collective introspection as a nation. I consider this one of those moments of that represent a crisis of conscience : A crisis of conscience especially for the liberation movement , but also for South African democracy.

It raises serious questions about the quality of our police service that in 2012, it responds to public manifestations with live ammunition.

It raises serious questions about the quality of our democratic state that, after eighteen years, we have not been able to train our police service to handle crowd control other than by repressive means.

It raises serious questions, especially after the death of Andries Tatane at the hands of the police , about the standing orders on public order policing within the SAPS.

On coming into office in 1994, the democratic government set about reforming what had in the past been a repressive apparatus into a police service. We demilitarised the Police as one means of re-orienting them to serving the people of the country. Perhaps such reform has not proceeded far enough? Or have they been arrested too soon by the exigencies of the present?

Notwithstanding the unfavourable international economic climate, the democratic government has kept the ship of the South African state on course. It is only those who are wilfully blind who can deny that our government has delivered a democracy dividend to the people of this country.

- The democratic government has restored and given rights to a host of communities, defined by faith and by chosen lifestyle.
- Since 1994, the democratic government has delivered new housing units at a rate of over 1000 units per day.
- The democratic government has multiplied the number of South Africans who cook with electricity by 130%
- The democratic government has multiplied the number of South Africans who have clean running water in their homes by 71%
- The democratic government has multiplied the number of South Africans who have access to schooling
- The democratic government has brought health and social services to all South Africans. These are undeniable successes!

Our un-deniable successes, I think, have led to an attitude of complacency and postures within the movement itself of “let’s go along, to get along” . Or worse yet “let’s go along, to get ahead”.

We have in the past observed the leadership of the ANC, in and out of government, go along quietly as the denialism of a President played havoc with the health and the lives of millions!

It is at moments such as these that the mettle of our leadership and the quality of our movement are tested.

Those among us who want to close their eyes to reality might not like facing up to the widely held perception that we live in an environment of corruption.

- A widelyperception that this corruption is sustained and encouraged by a pervasive attitude of connivance and impunity.
- A widelyperception that the ANC, as a movement and as a government, is very permissive about corruption.
- A widelyperception the ANC is permissive because some of its own leaders and members are implicated in such corruption.

We have seen what denialism, on the part of the ANC and its leadership, led to in the past.

Over the past eight years have seen the escalation of local protests over perceived delivery failures and corruption at local government level. It might well be that many of these protests are fuelled by rising expectations: There can be no doubt that in many instances this has led to ANC councillors losing legitimacy among the people. It is only a matter of time before that loss of legitimacy percolates upwards – to the provincial and national leadership.

The successes the democratic government has registered over the past eighteen years are the direct result of the strategic vision our movement has pursued over the years. It was that strategic vision that had enabled the ANC to raise itself from the near-dismemberment immediately after Rivonia, and over some years attain the status of effective leader of all the democratic forces of the country during CODESA.

It was that strategic vision that took us from the doldrums of Bhisho in September 1992, to April 1994.

The strategy that our movement had devised and tested in the crucible of struggle, over decades, was to mobilise all those who could be mobilised against the common enemy. The strategy of our movement was to isolate the main enemy. And, we did this by winning to our side all those political and social forces who sought change in earnest. There were also those whom we could not organise. If it was possible, we sought to neutralise such forces rather than drive them into active opposition.

Can any of us claim that our movement is applying such a strategy today?

It is true that we left twenty eight of our fallen in Bhisho on that bitter September day. But it was Oupa Gqozo, the collaborationist stratum he led, the de Klerk government, the third force they claimed they could not control, who were defeated on that day. On 21st September it was announced that CODESA would resume. The movement was able to return to CODESA II having extracted firm commitments to negotiate in good faith from de Klerk.

How do we assess the he outcomes produced by the actions of the ANC and the government it leads? They are not creating/promoting a widening network along which the ANC's influence radiates. They have rather led to increasing isolation as the sphere of influence of the movement shrinks. The credibility of the ANC today is probably the lowest it

has been since 1990! The ANC leadership has been stripped of its dignity! The best advice one can offer our movement, which seems caught in a hole is: "Stop digging!"

How we emerge from this terrible tragedy will depend on how seriously we take and address the challenges it has placed before us.

I commend the speed with which President Zuma acted. It demonstrates the determination of the government to get at the truth that the President appointed a Judicial Commission of Inquiry within days of the shootings. The government has also assisted bereaved families with burial costs and offered counselling and comfort. All highly commendable! As commendable as the appointment of the commission is, its primary concern will be to establish legal matters of fact relating to the specific events of that fateful day, August 16th. We are confident that the Judicial Commission of Inquiry will conduct its investigations with the appropriate rigour and uncover all the relevant facts.

But Marikana is symptomatic of a much deeper malaise. The all too easy recourse to lethal violence on the part of the Police tells its own terrifying tale. Besieged by new forms of violent crime, often perpetrated by criminals armed with military hardware, the South African Police Service has been exhorted to meet fire with fire many times by more than one minister and National Police Commissioner. This might have had the unfortunate consequence of encouraging the use of lethal force.

The sources of the tensions that led to bloodshed on August 16th are far deeper than the specific events that unfolded that day. I want to use this platform to call upon the leadership of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) to convene a Workers' Commission of Inquiry into the Marikana tragedy. COSATU should invite the other two union federations to participate in such a Workers' Commission. If international participation is possible that too could be harnessed. Such a Workers Commission should investigate, amongst other things, the return to South Africa's mining industry of the "native labour touts", who pitted workers against each other yester year. The "outsourcing" of recruitment through labour brokers was prevalent in Marikana. Labour brokers and their presence have played a notorious role in piling up the dry tinder of conflict. A Workers Commission should also shed light on the manner in which the mining industry is evading its responsibilities to its work force who live in shanty-towns around the mines. This industry, built by the robber baron Randlords and corporate giants who battered on the apartheid system, some claim, should today be subsidised with the tax rands of ordinary workers to encourage it to create jobs!

A Workers' Commission should also be tasked with investigating the shockingly high levels of violence in our society. An aspect of this violence is the high incidence of private gun ownership in this country. The close correlation between high levels of gun ownership and gun-related crime is now well established. The best way to curb gun related crimes is to move towards a gun-free society. The police service in a gun-free society will have less need to carry firearms.

Madam Premier,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Comrades and friends,

Does it sit easily with the membership of the ANC? Does it sit easily with the millions of ANC supporters here at home, and in the world at large that during its centennial year, the government, led by the ANC presided over the first post-democracy state massacre?

How do we explain to the shade of Uncle J.B. Marks that today it is bullets fired from the automatic weapons of our democratic police service that are creating widows and orphans in the villages of the eastern Cape, of Lesotho, of the north-west province?

Who will explain to the martyrs of Bisho that the Police service of the democracy for which they laid down their lives, also fires live ammunition at demonstrators?

The tensions that erupted in the ongoing strike that led to the events of August 16th are in many respects the result of the compromises the movement made to attain the beach-head of democracy in 1994. And, make no mistake, attaining the beachhead of democracy was vitally important and a significant victory! But it also persuaded us to substitute BEE for wealth redistribution. And when we find that inadequate we substitute it with BEEE! Yes, we persuaded ourselves to be content with less than what we had fought for, because that beachhead gave us much more than what we had had.

What has unfortunately also been most misunderstood is Madiba's call for and his own efforts to promote reconciliation. His call that we leave the past behind us to build the future together, has been misconstrued to suggest that no wrong was committed in the past. To suggest that reconciliation demanded no palpable acts of redress.

In another context, back in 1999, I raised the question: Will our Black captains of industry behave like the Randlords who incited the Anglo-Boer War and were ultimately responsible for the atrocities of the Concentration Camps? Or will they behave like the latter-day White monopolists who mouthed liberal sentiments, voted for the UP while they profited handsomely from collaborating with apartheid? Or would pioneer a new path of corporate responsibility by promoting better healthier industrial relations, the skilling and decent remuneration of workers?

Regrettably, it would appear the emergent Black capitalist class are have bought into and are being incorporated into the culture of White monopoly capital. How culpable are they in this tragedy??

It might be unpleasant, but the current ANC leadership and the government it leads must accept that it is probably presiding over the years of the ANC's most profound post-democracy crisis. That poses the matter of the quality of the movement's leadership at this moment.

Every movement for political transformation has arrived at this moment of truth sooner or later. During the French Revolution it came on the 18th Brumaire, when a young artillery officer, named Napoleon Bonaparte fired grapeshot into the crowd in Paris, The young officer rose to become Consul, that is military dictator, of France, and ultimately raised himself to Emperor! During the Russian Revolution that moment arrived at Kronstadt, when units of the Red Army suppressed a longstanding stronghold of the revolution.

Has that moment arrived for South Africa in the shape of Marikana?

Let Marikana be the moment to once again take hold of the movement of our people and steer it towards the sound and sober strategies of the past.

The elective conference that the ANC will hold at the end of this year must rise to the challenge of producing a leadership corps that has the moral will, the moral courage and moral standing to take on task of cleaning the Augean stables of corruption!

The elective conference of the ANC must rise to the challenge of producing a leadership corps that will restore the credibility of the movement amongst supporters, its friends and even amongst its opponents.

The elective conference of the ANC must rise to the challenge of producing a leadership corps that will restore the movement's reputation and record of compassion.

Only by correcting itself in that manner will the ANC regain the confidence of the democratic forces of this country and take us all on a higher trajectory to a better life for all our people!

Thank You.